The Army Officer as Warfighter

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Battle is the ultimate to which the whole life's labor of an officer should be directed. He may live to the age of retirement without seeing a battle; still, he must always be getting ready for it as if he knew the hour of the day it is to break upon him. And then, whether it comes late or early, he must be willing to fight—he must fight.

—Brigadier General C.F. Smith[1]

THE MILITARY OFFICER must fill a number of roles, often simultaneously. He has responsibilities as a warfighter, as the Nation's servant, as a member of the profession of arms, and as a leader of character. These four roles are interrelated almost to the point of inseparability, but examining each separately allows a better understanding of their inherent complexities.

The central premise of this article is that preparing for battle is a lifelong developmental process and a worthy life's work. While fighting America's wars is not the professional soldier's only task, it is the task that only the professional soldier can do. Warfighting's complex arrangement of activities includes generating, applying, and sustaining combat power from the fort to the port to the fighting position to achieve the aims of policy. Most of the examples cited come from the realms of direct and indirect fire, but that fact stems more from our inability to discuss the other critical aspects of warfighting than it does from any contention that the point of the spear is somehow more important than the shaft.

Developing the set of skills necessary to manage violence in the Nation's service is a lifelong developmental process that begins when an officer receives his commission and continues throughout a career. Professionalism is a combination of competence and devotion to service that grows over time, and growth occurs differently in each individual. There is no rank or position or level of education that clearly delineates the professional from the mere jobholder. Furthermore, the relationship between professionals at differing stages of career development is symbiotic. The younger professional benefits from the older one's wisdom and dignity, while the older benefits from the younger one's idealism and energy.

Mastering the art and science of warfighting encompasses every aspect of the human experience—physical, intellectual, and moral.[2] To understand fully the officer's responsibilities as a warfighter, we must explore in detail each of these aspects.

The Physical Dimension

The Army inspires soldiers to have the strength, the confidence, and the will to fight and win anywhere, anytime.

—The Army Vision, 2002[3]

This statement from Army Vision, 2002, is as applicable to General George Washington's crossing of the Delaware in 1776 as it is to Task Force Eagle's crossing of the Sava in 1995. Warfighting always has been and always will be a struggle, not only against hostile forces but also against hostile environments. The officer as warfighter has a duty to prepare himself and his subordinates to cope with such physical rigors. This duty begins at the earliest stages of an officer's service.

After arriving at his first duty station, a second lieutenant is expected to set the standard for his platoon in physical toughness. Toughness, not mere fitness, is the standard by which soldiers measure leaders. That the lieutenant be in excellent physical condition is necessary, but not sufficient. More important is his willingness to share his soldiers' physical hardships. Sergeant Major John Stepanek, addressing a group of officer candidates, stated succinctly what they could expect from noncommissioned officers

(NCOs): "You can expect loyalty to your position, devotion to our cause, admiration for your honest effort, courage to match your courage, guts to match your guts, endurance to match your endurance, motivation to match your motivation, esprit to match your esprit, a desire for achievement to match your desire for achievement. . . . We won't mind the heat if you sweat with us. We won't mind the cold if you shiver with us. . . . And if the mission requires, we will storm the very gates of Hell, right behind you."[4]

The importance of leader presence in the worst possible conditions—in the mud and rain during training or at the point of maximum danger during combat—cannot be overestimated. When the officer endures such hardships alongside his soldiers, the hardships become the glue that binds the unit into a cohesive fighting force. If the officer uses his rank or position to exempt himself from such hardship, the effect is exactly the opposite. The same hardships, endured only by lower ranking unit members, become the acid that dissolves the unit into a mob of sullen, angry individuals, each emulating his leader by looking first to his own safety and comfort.

As an officer grows in seniority, the obligation to endure hardships alongside his soldiers becomes ever more important. Senior officers exposing themselves to the dangers of combat has an energizing effect on soldiers that defies rational calculation. Great commanders are aware of this effect and make every effort to bring their leadership to bear on the decisive point in the same way they bring to bear firepower, maneuver, or information. Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz prescribed the commander's presence as an anecdote for the soldier's exhaustion: "As each man's strength gives out, as it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole comes to rest on the commander's will alone. The ardor of his spirit must rekindle the flame of purpose in others; his inward fire must revive their hopes."[5]

The officer as warfighter is duty bound to educate himself and his subordinates on the theory and practice of war. Such an education trains an officer not what to think but how to think. In this way, officers develop in themselves and in their subordinates what Fuller describes as "creative intelligence." Applying creative intelligence allows officers to know when to adhere to time-honored wisdom and when to disregard convention and attempt the unconventional.

General Matthew Ridgeway, famous for his presence at the front, put the matter this way: "I held to the old-fashioned idea that it helped the spirits of the men to see the Old Man up there, in the snow and the sleet and the mud, sharing the same cold, miserable existence they had to endure."[6] Ridgeway's ability to inspire his soldiers to face danger and hardship rested solely on his credibility. Ridgeway did not order his solders into battle from a comfortable headquarters. He led them into battle and shared their dangers and hardships in the process.

The Intellectual Dimension

The Nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to have its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards.

—Sir William Francis Butler[7]

Courage is a necessary attribute in every soldier, but courage alone can never be sufficient for the officer to exercise his duties as a warfighter. A comprehensive knowledge of the theory and practice of warfare must govern his courage. Such knowledge enables him to win the Nation's wars at an acceptable cost in blood and treasure. In the absence of such knowledge, warfare becomes (to use the Confederates' painfully accurate critique of Union tactics at Fredericksburg) "simply murder."

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US Army

Matthew B. Ridgway inspecting the 25th Infantry Division front in west central Korea, March 1951.

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The officer's duty to develop intellectually begins at the earliest stages of his service. Every officer basic course graduate is expected to demonstrate an elementary understanding of the theory and practice of small unit combat operations. The theoretical aspects of such operations are expressed in Army doctrine. Doctrine is essentially a distillation of theory on how best to employ combat power to ensure mission accomplishment. Even the most basic battle drill on reacting to contact is grounded in a theory on the relationship between fire and maneuver. The practical aspects of such operations include the technical knowledge required to employ available resources to accomplish assigned missions.

The new officer immediately puts this knowledge into practice on arriving at his first assignment. Commanders expect second lieutenants to accomplish missions by applying Army doctrine and resources to real-world problems. Noncommissioned officers, with their wealth of experience, help young officers put doctrine and resources into practice. Every commander worth his salt advises the new lieutenant to "listen to your NCOs." However, that advice does not mean, "do what your sergeants say." Rather, it means, "understand what your sergeants know." As the young officer acquires more experience, his appreciation for the applications and limitations of doctrine grows as well.

As officers advance in seniority, their responsibilities increase and their education must keep pace. The lieutenant leads a platoon and conducts battle drills on a small objective. The lieutenant colonel commands a task force and employs combined arms tactics throughout an area of operations. The lieutenant general commands a joint task force and applies operational art to achieve the aims of national policy.

As an officer's challenges become more unique and complex, doctrine recedes into the background, drawing into sharp relief the senior commander's creative intelligence—Robert E. Lee at Chancellorsville—or lack thereof—George A. Custer at Little Bighorn. Lee and Custer violated the principle of mass by dividing their forces in the presence of a numerically superior enemy. Lee is rightly

US Army

Hamid Karzi and Frank L. "Buster" Hagenbeck talk to 10th Mountain Division soldiers at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, 30 March 2002.

The Army not only wins wars, it also maintains postwar peace almost everywhere it places its boots. In Germany, Bosnia, Kosovo, Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and perhaps soon in Iraq, U.S. Army officers serve the Nation's interests by maintaining stability and acting as a check on potential aggressors. Peacekeeping goes hand in hand with warfighting as a critical role of military officership, and it is likely to increase in importance in the post-Cold War world.

celebrated for his audacity; Custer is rightly condemned for his stupidity. A commander's intellect might well mark the difference between success and failure, and the Army must continue to recognize and encourage its warfighters' intellectual development so they know when to follow doctrine, when to violate it, and when to write it by their actions on future battlefields.

The Moral Dimension

We are completely devoted; we are members of a priesthood really, the sole purpose of which is to defend the Republic.

—General George C. Marshall[9]

While every aspect of warfighting is demanding, only the moral aspect of warfighting is paradoxical. To protect the State from the dangers of anarchy, the warfighter must be fierce enough to kill the State's enemies, but to protect the State from the dangers of tyranny, he must be gentle enough to respect the freedoms of its citizens. Faced with this paradox, Socrates despaired of founding a republic that was both secure and just.

America's Republic has proven Socrates wrong. Our country is, in President Abraham Lincoln's eternal words, "a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."[10] This idea, that U.S. officers swear to defend against all enemies foreign and domestic, is enshrined in the world's oldest living constitution, the U.S. Constitution.

An officer derives legal and moral authority to employ force from his subordination to America's ideals. Legally, the President and Congress confer the officer's authority in the form of a commission, which gives the officer broad authority to act within the law to protect the Constitution. Morally, the officer's authority is derived from his role as a servant of society. The officer who subordinates his personal safety and comfort to the security of soci-

ety inspires subordinates to do likewise. America's Army of free citizens, inspired by examples of selfless service, has been and will remain the most potent military force on the planet. The graveyard of history is filled with petty tyrants and gangsters who underestimated the power of U.S. arms and ideals.

The young officer learns early to wield his legal authority lightly and to assert his moral authority boldly. The unit held together by an officer who only threatens punishment will soon dissolve in the face of the enemy. However, the unit bound by a shared belief in what is true, right, and just is actually made stronger in the crucible of combat. Sergeants teach young officers to speak to soldiers not by threatening punishment for doing wrong, but by explaining the necessity of doing right. In 1879, Major General John Schofield advised West Point cadets that "the discipline which makes the soldiers of a free country reliable in battle is not to be gained by harsh or tyrannical treatment."[11] A Nation founded to affirm the dignity of every citizen can only be defended by affording that same dignity to every soldier.

As officers advance in seniority, the necessity of wielding arms in accordance with America's ideals becomes ever more important. In America's short history, the world has grown smaller and more dangerous, and the U.S. Army has necessarily grown larger and more powerful. So powerful a force can be an instrument of good or evil, depending on the character of those who command it. The officer is duty bound to achieve the aims of policy through the application of violence. However, that violence must be applied in a manner consistent with America's laws and treaty obligations as well as her sense of decency. The officer must remember that he carries into battle not only America's arms, but also her honor.

The Army is raised by a free society to preserve the freedom of the American people and their allies; it must never be employed as an instrument of repression either abroad or at home. The singular challenge for the officer is to wield the enormous power of America's arms in such as way as to inspire awe and fear in its enemies while retaining the respect and affection of its citizens.

The Changing Challenges of Leadership

And through all this welter of change and development, your mission remains fixed, determined, inviolable. It is to win our wars.

—General of the Army Douglas MacArthur[12]

The world has changed dramatically in only a few years' time, which has caused profound implications for the military profession. The events of 11 September 2001 are not only what have provoked changes in officership challenges; the end of the Cold War is also forcing us to rethink our responsibilities. The demise of a nation-state and political system with the will and the ability to eradicate the United States is a fundamental sea-change in the international system that created corresponding changes in officers' responsibilities. We are guardians of our Nation's place in the world order; when that order changes, so too must our understanding of our responsibilities change.

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The Soviet Union's demise does not lessen the challenge of officership; on the contrary, when the threat to the Nation is evident and symmetrical, the physical, moral, and especially the intellectual challenges of officership are comparatively simple to understand, if not always easy to achieve. Generations of Army officers came of age eating, sleeping, and breathing the tactics and organization of the Group Soviet Forces Germany. To this day, they can rattle off the number of Soviet amphibious infantry combat vehicles from divisional and regimental reconnaissance they expect to see in a brigade sector before the combat reconnaissance patrol shows its much-loved face. However, when we can no longer be certain of our enemy's order of battle, or even who our enemy is likely to be, the officer's task becomes correspondingly more difficult.

Officers of the 21st century have shed none of their responsibilities to be competent warfighters. The current prospect of a conventional invasion of Iraq constantly reminds us that competence in heavy armored operations remains essential to the Nation's survival. Yet even as we sharpen our tank gunnery skills, and as our light infantry and Special Forces soldiers continue the search for Osama bin-Laden in other countries in the Middle East, we are reminded that war and peace are profoundly political activities.

MacArthur is remembered in history as much for writing the Japanese constitution and establishing a

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peaceful, stable postwar Japanese nation as he is for his island-hopping campaign across the Pacific. The Army not only wins wars, it also maintains postwar peace almost everywhere it places its boots. In Germany, Bosnia, Kosovo, Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and perhaps soon in Iraq, U.S. Army officers serve the Nation's interests by maintaining stability and acting as a check on potential aggressors. Peacekeeping goes hand in hand with warfighting as a critical role of military officership, and it is likely to increase in importance in the post-Cold War world.

As Saint Augustine reminds us, the only purpose for war is to create a better peace. As the officer applies his expertise in warfighting, he must constantly keep that better peace in mind. The 21st-century officer must be able to transition rapidly across the spectrum of operations. To create a better peace, he must have the ability to lead troops in the conduct of offensive, defensive, and stability and support operations. These operations might occur simultaneously, and the transition from one to the other will often be made at the discretion of junior leaders. The officer who wins the war and loses the peace is no more professional than the physician who saves a patient's leg at the expense of his spinal cord.

The physical demands of peacekeeping do not differ appreciably from those of warfighting. That the peacekeeper on his beat in Kosovo remains alert and physically ready is just as essential as it is for the tank commander in Kuwait. However, the moral—and especially the intellectual—requirements of officership are much more difficult in a world in which officers serve to deter and prevent war as much as to win it. Officers must understand and appreciate the languages and cultures of a number of states and nations that might or might not pose a threat to the Nation. How well officers perform their duties might be decisive in determining whether those states become friend or foe.

On 11 September 2001, we learned again that military security in and of itself is insufficient. The most powerful military the world has ever seen was powerless against a cowardly attack on unarmed civilians. In his 1961 inaugural address, President John F. Kennedy issued "a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, 'rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation'—a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."[13] Today's Army officers must recognize the fundamental truth of Kennedy's call. Succeeding in the long twilight struggle that has been thrust on us demands all of the physical, moral, and intellectual energies we can bring to bear to prepare for the responsibilities we must bear as warfighters and as officers of the world's most vital and powerful Army. ***MR***

NOTES

1. C.F. Smith, quoted in Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Co., 1956), 71-72.
2. Our division of the officer's responsibilities is borrowed from J.F.C. Fuller, *Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cures* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1936).
3. Quoted in Lawrence P. Crocker, *Army Officer's Guide,* 45th ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1990), 61.
4. John Stepanek, "As a Senior NCO Sees It," *Army Digest* (August 1967): 5-6.
5. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* eds. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 121.
6. Matthew Ridgeway, quoted in U.S. Army, FM 22-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 31 August 1999), 6-30.
7. Sir William Francis Butler, quoted by Missouri Representative Ike Skelton, Conference on Military Education for the 21st-Century Warrior, Naval Post-Graduate School and Office of Naval Research, accessed online at <http://web.nps.navy.mil/FutureWarrior/Remarks/Skelton.html>, 15 October 02.
8. Fuller, 35.
9. George C. Marshall, quoted in Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, vol. 3, *Organizer of Victory, 1943-1945* (New York: Viking, 1973), 458-59, cited in Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 205.
10. Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address," quoted in Jerome Agel, ed., *Words that Make America Great* (New York: Random House, 1997), 216.
11. Quoted in USMA, *Bugle Notes* (New York: USMA, 1984), 245.
12. Douglas MacArthur, Thayer Award Acceptance Speech, 12 May 1962, cited in *Bugle Notes,* 48.
13. John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, 20 January 1961.

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